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The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Canada) · Sat, Mar 1, 1980 · Page 102
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WARREN ZEVON
Bad luck streak

RAMONES
End of The Century

IGGY POP
Soldier

Zevon covers his tracks with plenty of L. A. gloss

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
of The Gazette

Maybe the most affecting thing about Warren Zevon's new album is its title, *Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School* (Asylum). Snappy, cryptic, just the thing you'd expect from a Los Angeles studio angel.

And, apparently, just what the critics want to hear, for Zevon is described as being imbued with all sorts of Hollywood profundities. For the record, Zevon does not cut a cool figure of speech worthy of Raymond Chandler or Dashiel Hammett — he's not even close. In the matter of foreign intrigue — Warren hung out in Spanish beach towns, learned of mercenaries in bars, and has a widely-publicized fascination with guns — he can't hold a candle to Graham Greene.

Zevon's reputation seems to be based upon listeners' fantasies being satisfied by the image of Zevon's place among the Los Angeles recording elite. These are the midnight cowboys who shoot coke and make midnight raids on Hollywood's cushiest studios, where they can hide out and contemplate their existential condition. A very marketable image, a latter-day parallel to the studio lot action in the golden age of Hollywood.

True to form, the record company has superimposed, over a back cover photo of a gun lying next to ballet shoes (cute, snappy), a list of these studio angels: three Eagles (Glen Frey, Don Henley, Joe Walsh), Jackson Browne, Linda Ronstadt, J.D. Souther, and such slick session musicians as Leland Sklar, Rick Morotta, Waddy Wachtel, and David Lindley.

The production is, of course, super slick. Those Eagles-like harmonies have that patented *ennui* of Hollywood studs who've tried all manner of drugs and flesh and are still not satisfied. Drugstore cowboy gigolos — mighty attractive. The sinewy guitars are mixed in just right.

However, what Zevon and cohorts are saying is not nearly as apocalyptic as they make out. Zevon, of course, is an admitted alcoholic so maybe some of his songs have a certain inner meaning. But **Empty-Handed Heart** is merely an I-lost-my-baby dittie that's been written a hundred times better before and only the trenchant backings can save such pleas as **Bad Luck** and **Bed of Coals**. The little parable upon wacky Expos pitcher Bill Lee is merely insignificant. **Gorilla You're A Desperado** is just another of those crying-in-your-beer laments about how tough life is in the fast lane.

Such compositions as **Jungle Work**, about mercenaries, and **Play It All Night Long**, about the old south, manage to make up for Zevon's huffy struggling vocals. Too little too late, but Zevon and cohorts manage to cover up with the Los Angeles gloss.

Ramones' road rocky

The strange career of legendary record producer Phil Spector continues with his "wall-of-sound" treatment of the New York punk group The Ramones on *End of the Century* (Sire). Since the Ramones have only minimal musical talents, they fit right in with many of the other street corner artists the "first teenage tycoon of pop" (as Tom Wolfe described him) has used as a vehicle for his schlocky Wagnerian style.

The magic of Spector's style has always been his belief in providing his acts with emotional "depth" by surrounding them in a well of sound that seems bottomless. It works for about half of this album, including a re-make of his Ronettes hit, **Baby I Love You. Danny Says** is a haunting little dittie about loneliness of the rock circuit, and **Do You Remember Rock 'n' Roll Radio** and **This Ain't Havana** are fine rock 'n' roll evocations.

Iggy's effort goes pop

Soldier (Arista) is the title of Iggy Pop's latest and, sure enough, the cover photo depicts him — red-painted eyelids closed, shoulders slumped in exhaustion — as a embattled rock 'n' roll trooper. Better to call him soldier than survivor. Despite the promise of his last comeback album, *New Values*, 1960s-survivor Iggy has slipped into his old fatigues and seems to have a hard enough time singing, let alone sounding outrageous. He sings **I Need More** — "I walk around, I flop around, I need something that will be found. More venom, more dynamite, more disaster, I need more than I ever did before." Perhaps the reason he needs more is because he gets less these days. Anyway, that's no excuse for inflicting the listener with stale neurotic nonsense only a shrink should hear.

MSO program plans a wide variety of selections

By ROBERT MARKOW
Special to The Gazette

Next week's Montreal Symphony Orchestra concerts will comprise a varied program, ranging from Mozart to the contemporary Canadian, Clermont Pepin. Schumann's *Symphony No. 1 in Bb* ("Spring"), Pepin's *Chroma* (1973), Mozart's concert aria *Ch'io mi scordi di te* K.505, and Strauss' *Four Last Songs* will be heard. The American soprano Jessye Norman will be the soloist in the latter two works. Recordings of this music are discussed in today's column.

Schumann composed his *Spring* symphony in January and February, 1841 — the dead of winter. However, the vernal association in the composer's mind was not a calendar season, but rather a personal, emotional springtime — a season of romantic ardor, high spirits, and creative exuberance.

This frame of mind is well delineated throughout most of Zubin Mehta's recording with the Vienna Philharmonic (London CS-7309).

The first movement is taken at a brisk tempo, and is full of freshness, vigor, and joie de vivre. The climax is well-prepared, and comes off impressively. Well-articulated rhythmic vitality adds to the pleasure of this performance. Unfortunately, the lyrical second theme in the woodwinds is treated indifferently, but this is a minor blemish.

Details of each bar

The second movement is less successful. Mehta seems preoccupied with the details of each bar, without letting the musical lines sing.

It must be pointed out though, that the orchestra's strings are given a fine opportunity to show their magnificent, opulent sound. The cellos in particular distinguish themselves, here as elsewhere in the symphony.

After the strangely dark Scherzo, with its two contrasting trios, comes the Finale. Here Mehta reveals his best work, generating true excitement.

Raphael Kubelik's recording with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon Resonance 2535 116) complements Mehta's in numerous ways. The most obvious case is heard in the slow movement — where Mehta gets lost in details, Kubelik provides long-breathed, arching lines and beautifully limpid phrasing.

Whereas Mehta's opening fanfare to the first movement is acceptable but matter-of-fact, Kubelik's is bold, noble and arresting, just as Schumann requested: Play it "as though it were from on high, like a call to awakening."

Kubelik is not as exciting as Mehta in the Finale, where the former trips along blithely, but without conviction. Kubelik also ignores the repeat of the exposition in this movement, which seems unbalanced without it. The most disturbing point in Kubelik's performance is the lumpy, plodding second *Trio*, which Mehta handles well.

All told, I prefer Mehta's interpretation, but Kubelik's is fine too, and at about half the price. Both discs generously offer the same composer's *Fourth Symphony* as a coupling.

Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs* are often called collectively his "swan song." They were composed in 1948, the year before his death, and neither published nor performed during the composer's lifetime. All are concerned in some metaphorical way with approaching death, not as dreaded traumatic experience, but as a man in his golden years, calmly looking back on life with autumnal, melancholic sadness and resignation.

RICHARD STRAUSS
Four last songs

Elizabeth Schwarzkopf's recording of these sublime songs is one of the greatest she ever made; I may even venture to say that it is one of the supreme issues in the entire history of the phonograph.

When the record came out in 1966 (Angel S-36347), critics tripped over each other trying to find superlatives that adequately described the ravishingly beautiful singing.

As a single example of Schwarzkopf's exquisite artistry, listen to the last words of the second song (*September*) — how the voice becomes weaker as the "weary eyes" close, and how on the final syllable "zu" there is a slight, ever so slight, punctuation as the eyelids flick shut.

This recording is further distinguished by rapturous horn and violin solos, played with the same melting tenderness and refinement that mark Schwarzkopf's singing. George Szell is a most sympathetic conductor with the Berlin Radio Symphony.

There are no other stereo recordings that come close to Scharzkopf in these songs, but as Kiri Te Kanawa's recording came out just a few months ago, a few words would be timely here (Columbia M-35140).

Lack of color

The singing is for the most part satisfactory. Her voice is rich and dark, entirely appropriate for these songs, but there is a distinct lack of vocal color and emotional involvement. Even more upsetting is Andrew Davis' cool, indifferent conducting. In minutes and seconds Davis is not much faster than Szell, but whereas Szell breathes life into the music and allows it to flow slowly but spontaneously, Davis seems to force the tempos and overlook most of the music's transcendent beauty.

Schwarzkopf fans will be delighted to know that this great lady of song has also recorded the Mozart aria on next week's program (Angel S-36643), "Ch'io mi scordi di te" (That I should forget you?) is an extended 11-minute concert aria for soprano, piano obbligato and orchestra. The complex interweaving of the three constituents is most effectively realized, and is representative of Mozart at the peak of both his technical and emotive powers.

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N.B. The order of the program has been changed.

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